



Abstract

The forward motion of jazz dance is dependent on both preservation and innovation. This thesis aims to explore how jazz stays connected to its deeply rooted origins while moving ahead in an ever-changing society. This is not a historical overview of jazz dance, nor is it an attempt to brand it with a universal definition. It is a personal interrogation of how jazz has earned its weight in the dance world through the roots and branches of its evolution and how I strive to move forward as a jazz educator and choreographer with reverence and significance. The history of jazz dance is rich and complex and my creative process aims to teach as well as to inspire. My interpretation of the art form continues to develop through the rhythmic dynamics, physical attributes, and stylistic influences inherent in the discipline, and my artistic identity continues to expand by responding to those elements in conjunction with my own intuition, education, and creative impulses. I look back to dance forward, sharing my voice with my students and with my audience.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Make Way: Jazz Dance in Motion Through Preservation and Towards Innovation

by

Lisa Harvie Covin

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

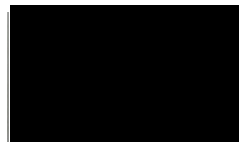
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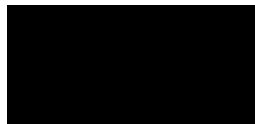
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Make Way: Jazz Dance in Motion through Preservation and Towards Innovation

This thesis is an inquiry into the roots and evolution of jazz dance. It is my conversation with the art form and my contribution to a long-held discussion about an American art form, based in African traditions. Originating in the early part of the 20th century, jazz dance has spun and transformed into so many versions of itself that it has become a kaleidoscope of styles and techniques. The question “What is jazz?” typically sends dancers and educators circling the drain on a search to find undisputed definitions. It is a somewhat misconstrued art form, and it is by nature always evolving. Jazz dance is constantly in motion and shifts with the cultural tides of society. It adjusts to changing trends in music and takes on multiple identities by blending different aesthetics and styles. It is a deeply rooted art form, and yet it is incredibly elusive. That is in essence why jazz is so intriguing. It is difficult to pin down and put it into words and is perhaps better explained through dance. As jazz pioneer Gus Giordano once said,

A dance that receives its personality from the music of the time must be of a frivolous nature. I think this is what I really love about jazz dancing – just when I think I’ve figured it out it takes a new turn and I start thinking again
(Giordano v).

I am intrigued by the question posed by Patricia Cohen, “Where is the jazz?” (qtd. in Guarino 6) Where do we find it in the dance world today? I believe that to find jazz one must know what to look for and this requires learning more about the history of the art form and its fundamental elements. Her question has led me to mine, which is: “What makes what I do, Jazz?”

I have been a jazz dance educator for twenty-five years and I am still making new discoveries. I continue to search for ways to expand my versatility as a jazz choreographer that strike a balance between preservation and innovation. By

preservation I mean upholding the history of jazz dance and keeping it alive in my own work. I aim to discover how my choreography might evolve by giving more weight to the origins of the art form and to its early pioneers. I use the word innovation to mean both the creation of something new and the use of familiar material combined in different ways to inspire new understandings and foster possibilities. Innovation can take two forms: the bold, catalytic change that comes from sudden discovery or the slower, more granular change that comes from dawning awareness and experimentation that slowly grows into new methods and insights. My work as a jazz dance artist moves towards innovation because I am intentionally seeking and promoting connections with which I hope to inspire further development in the form. My choreographic thesis aims to explore the roots of jazz and its fundamental elements using a performance process as an educational process, both for the audience but even more so for the dancers. I have combined choreography with pedagogy to create a piece that is “time-honored” (Stearns 362) but also forward thinking. That is what makes what I do, Jazz, and how I move forward with the form.

I have investigated how I interpret the most fundamental elements of jazz dance: the music, the rhythm, the syncopation, the African influence, the specific physical attributes, the vernacular style of swing, and the blending of different dance forms, as well as how I have been influenced by innovative jazz pioneers. What I have discovered is that my interpretation of the art form continues to develop by staying connected to these fundamental elements and by recognizing the legacies of these early jazz artists; my work as a jazz educator and choreographer becomes more defined and more creative by integrating this foundation with my own intuition, education, and creative impulses.

Rationale

I can break down my relationship with jazz dance into two parts of my life. The jazz I learned as a young dancer growing up in Ottawa Canada was based primarily on form and style that supported similar philosophies to classical ballet. I had a solid dance education in multiple dance disciplines but the jazz I learned did not connect directly to African-American vernacular dance, nor to the propulsive rhythms and grounded movement characteristics of dances from African Diaspora. I did, however, learn the value of versatility. The training I received in diverse disciplines contributes to my jazz aesthetic which blends the technical precision of ballet, the athleticism of Scottish highland dancing and the rhythmicity of tap.

My second introduction to jazz occurred when I moved to New York City after college in the late 1990's. Through my interactions with other dancers, influential educators, and choreographers, I learned more about different jazz dance styles and techniques. I was exposed to theatrical, lyrical, rhythmic, Latin and vernacular jazz forms and began to experience and experiment with Eugene Louis Faccuito (known as Luigi) technique, Jack Cole's style, and the subtleties of Bob Fosse in more contemporary choreography. I discovered how many styles and techniques were infused in jazz and that they were all rooted in African traditions and African American vernacular dance. I also began to appreciate the cool aesthetic of jazz - that high performative energy in the body that can be contained or released spontaneously.

Patricia Wilcox gave me much of this second education in jazz. For thirty years, Ms. Wilcox was an integral member of the jazz faculty at Steps on Broadway and is now a renowned Broadway choreographer. Her jazz class was my training ground for thirteen

years where, as my mentor, she introduced me to an eclectic array of jazz dance styles and instilled a strong connection between dance and music. She also focused on the versatility of the dance idiom. In 2010, I took over a professional dance class at Steps on Broadway for Ms. Wilcox. I was already on faculty at the School at Steps in their pre-professional training program, but had never taught at the professional level. Still today, as I walk into the studio, I feel the weight of having taken over the reins from one of the most influential jazz educators in the business. I feel a tremendous sense of loyalty to uphold the foundation of jazz. At the same time, I have found my artistic voice and have steadily defined myself as an individual jazz artist. I promote a similar versatility to what I was taught by exploring different forms of jazz, and advocate for a strong balance between style and technique. I specify form and placement with a focus on the polycentrism of jazz dance vocabulary. In my work as a jazz artist, my priorities are on the grounded movement, the dynamic play of syncopation and suspension, the use of improvisation, and the pulsating rhythm so inherent in the art form to drive my movements forward. Most importantly, I emphasize the deep connection that a jazz dancer must have with the music.

My experience working with professional dancers at Steps on Broadway prompted this research. Many of my students have referred to what I teach as ‘real jazz.’ This statement made me wonder what they meant, especially as my choreography is not always rooted in vernacular ‘authentic jazz.’ Why is my class listed as *Jazz* on the Steps on Broadway schedule? Why is there no word attached to differentiate it from other jazz forms such as Latin, fusion, Broadway, or contemporary? Would that class distinction take away from the very notion of experimentation and diversity within the discipline? I

appreciate the general term of ‘jazz’ because it leaves the door open to play and to jump from one style to another. It gives me the opportunity to infuse a broad historical context while exploring my own creative ideas. It inspires me to look at my above-mentioned query, ‘What makes what I do, Jazz?’ Where can I take it?

My choreographic thesis presentation is entitled *Make Way*. Make way for jazz dance; make way for its history; make way for innovation; make way for the styles and techniques that have grown from its deeply embedded roots; make way for my interpretation of jazz. Make way and keep up because jazz is always changing. My voice in jazz dance changes all the time. That is the gift of being an artist within this idiom. It has changed through my experience as a professional dancer in musical theater; it has changed through my years as an educator at Steps on Broadway in New York City where jazz teachers come and go, styles change, and new artistic trends emerge; it has changed as my appreciation for the rhythms of jazz music has grown and that in turn has influenced how I hear rhythms in other idioms; it has changed as I have matured and as my body has changed. I feel things differently in jazz today than I did fifteen years ago and am I drawn to movement that feels good as opposed to solely being concerned with how it looks. My creative voice changes as I learn more about dance genres that I was not exposed to in my early training, for example modern dance. It changes with the knowledge I continue to collect about the history of jazz dance and with the freedom I give myself to move with or against the current with my own creative force.

Review of Relevant Literature and Research Material

My creative work began with substantial research about the history of jazz dance. In my 25-year teaching career I was not ignorant to its evolution but I was eager

to dive deeper and fill in the gaps in my education. Marshall and Jean Stearns' book *Jazz Dance* provided me with tremendous insight into the primitive days of dance in America, and offered remarkable accounts of the West African origins of jazz dance as well as its paralleled development with jazz music. The book discusses major development in the pre-history of vernacular dance, its transition from folk to professional dance, its early beginnings in Minstrel shows, and its arrival in dance halls and on Broadway stages. What is so interesting is that this book about jazz dance leans heavily into the history of tap. Full chapters are devoted to King Rastus Brown, Bill Robinson, Frank Condos, John W. Bubbles, and Fred Astaire, to name a few. Tap and jazz dance share a common history, both linked to African traditions and African-American vernacular dance. The rhythmic conversation in tap simply moved from the feet to the whole body. Jack Cole and Asadata Dafora are prime examples of how jazz could be interpreted as a "drumming of the body" (Stearns 361). The key to sustaining vernacular jazz is to base everything around that rhythm and also to continue to explore how it blends with other art forms (Stearns 361). This book opened my eyes to the history of jazz before it became known as jazz. It also made me appreciate my early training in tap. I had very little concept as a young student of how significant it would later be to my career as a jazz dancer and educator. I learned the value of swing rhythm, and in turn syncopation, through tap and it crossed over into how I moved instinctively as a jazz dancer.

The recently published book *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches* (2014) picks up where Marshall Stearns left off, but is more of a compilation of historical accounts and profiles, based on the knowledge and experiences of seasoned jazz artists and educators. The book, edited by Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver, discusses

various aspects of the field, and each chapter is written by a different established jazz artist. It offers multiple points of view about jazz dance and profiles jazz dance pioneers such as Pepsi Bethel, Jack Cole, Bob Fosse, Luigi, Matt Mattox, and Gus Giordano, as well as innovators of other dance forms that contributed to the landscape of jazz dance such as Donald McKayle and Katherine Dunham. I believe that this book is a desperately needed resource for a sparsely documented art form. The library is well stocked with books about modern dance and musical theater. There is shockingly very little about jazz dance. I appreciate how this book includes the history of the art form, its related forms and styles, perspectives on the definition of jazz, and profiles of master teachers and choreographers. It is a resource that I will refer to repeatedly as an artist in this field.

The first section of the book grapples with the highly debatable question, “What is jazz?” Billy Siegenfeld, Bob Boross, Patricia Cohen and Sheron Wray, all renowned jazz artists and educators, supplied individual answers to this question. While it was not my intention for my thesis to define jazz, they each gave me something to contemplate about the art form and their perspectives pushed me to look deeper into my own relationship with the discipline. All four of these artists have inspired me through my research and are included at some juncture in this thesis.

Having taken class with Billy Siegenfeld I found it to be very interesting to read more about his strict adherence to swing in jazz dancing and the development of his own patented jump-rhythm jazz technique. He breaks down how syncopation must be worked into the structure of jazz choreography and I have taken his advice and tested my jazz artistry against the swing standard (Guarino 18). I agree that swing is the most authentic form of jazz dance and that it is the backbone of jazz - music and dance. While my

interpretation does pull away from swing, there are sections of my thesis performance that were deeply influenced by what I have learned about the principles of polyrhythm. Responding physically to two rhythms at once depends on what Billy Siegenfeld explains as ‘grounded rhythm’ and ‘jump rhythm.’ The former “compels the dancer to be aware of, if not actually move to, the pulse of the given music without varying its tempo at all.” The latter requires the dancer “to punch out syncopations that deliberately accent against the downbeats of this grounded rhythm” (qtd. in Guarino 21). As he explains further,

To make a dance that swings, the choreographer has to orchestrate a unity between these two fundamental rhythms that allows each to have its own say - and often at the same time! Only in this way will the dance begin to let loose with truly liberating syncopations (qtd. in Guarino 23).

Patricia Cohen discusses jazz as a dance continuum wherein the roots and the branches of the art form must always be recognized. As she explains, “Acknowledging the entirety of the genre allows us to establish historical, cultural, social, and kinetic continuity” (qtd. in Guarino 3). I wholeheartedly agree and believe, too, that a broader definition of jazz dance, one that includes different forms of the discipline, must still acknowledge its origins. Referring back to her question, “Where is the jazz?” it is important to recognize elements in movement today that still reflect its history. Is there syncopation? Is there a connection to the ground? Is there fluidity in the spine and a contraction in the body that might reflect African traditions?

Bob Boross continues along similar lines by attesting to the following:

The family of jazz dance exceeds the original creation and has taken shape in various configurations, however diluted, of that original jazz purity. To limit jazz dance as one particular thing would preclude the infinite possibilities of what it can be become. (qtd. in Guarino 8).

I concur with this statement and found his chapter to be extremely enlightening. He discusses the ‘genes’ of jazz dance that continually resurface, despite the lack of purity and potency in more contemporary jazz forms. These would include expression, movement characteristics, and rhythm, the latter two of which I decided to explore in my thesis performance. (Guarino 10).

Finally, Sheron Wray “centers jazz dance on four principles derived from an African aesthetic: rhythmicity, a formidable relationship with music, improvisation, and dynamic play.” I am inspired by her belief that “jazz has a rich soil that will continue to grow” and am dedicated to “exploring its foundations so that new inventions will continue to maintain a deep connection with music” (qtd. in Guarino 12). My process as a jazz artist begins with the music and I believe, too, that it supports how my own innovation is dependent upon preservation. I speak of innovation in the sense of being something new that I discover in my interpretation of jazz - trusting the foundation but seeking new avenues through the music. I explore this connection in the breakdown of my choreographic thesis.

Gus Giordano’s *Anthology of American Jazz Dance* rounded out my literary research. The book is a compilation of articles about jazz dance dating back as far as 1929 and ending in the mid 1970’s. It demonstrates how jazz reflects, as William Como said, “the temper of the times” (qtd. in Giordano iv). It was interesting to compare how jazz dance was discussed in the Jazz Era and how the conversation has changed over the years. It explores jazz as being America’s ethnic dance, as being a hybrid art form that pulls qualities from other art forms to become something new, and jazz as seen through

the eyes of innovative pioneers like Jack Cole, Jerome Robbins, Matt Mattox and Gus Giordano.

These books were the foundation of my research, and were supplemented with multiple journal articles and films about West African dance, African American vernacular dance, and theatrical jazz dance pioneers.

Three separate projects led up to this thesis. My preliminary research began in September of 2016 with my first special project on Jack Cole. Literary material obtained from the Archives at Jacob's Pillow Performing Arts Theater gave me an intimate look into his life as a modern dancer and later as a jazz choreographer. Diving into his world was incredibly inspiring, affording a greater understanding of the legacy he created for jazz with his demanding technique and trademark style. As a true jazz pioneer, his work exemplifies how important it is to preserve the past and to do something with it. Jerome Robbins, in 1984, had this to say about Jack Cole's style of dance.

Packed into Cole's body were fierce discipline, controlled furies, exuberant sexiness, immaculate clarity, athletic ardor... His movements, though rhythmically and kinetically complex, were exceptionally clear to the eye, spectacular whether gigantic or minuscule, tight without being restrictive, tense without being full of tension. (qtd. in Valis Hill 35).

There is something to be learned by going back and learning from an artist who changed the way that jazz was performed and something to be gained by using that information as a springboard to accessing something new in jazz. Generations of jazz choreographers have already done so.

My second special project was an experiential process that merged an eclectic group of jazz artists together, each with their own personal connections to the art form, based deeply on their background and cultural heritage. I learned so much from the three

dancers involved in this project, as well as from my collaborator, Vibecke Dahle. She is a New York based photographer who trained with Matt Mattox, a disciple of Jack Cole. Mr. Mattox's *freestyle jazz* was codified in the 1970's and his influence on the jazz world, though not on my radar as a young student, was profound and revolutionary. Ms. Dahle's knowledge about his specific technique again drove home the need for preservation in jazz dance vocabulary. Matt Mattox passed away a few years ago and not enough young dancers even know his name.

My third and final special project focused on my own relationship with the rhythmic dynamics of jazz dance. I made interesting discoveries about my creative impulses to music of all genres, my response to the syncopated swing of jazz music, and my adaptability to draw one musical style into another. This was a personal project and my open class at Steps on Broadway served as my explorative lab. Some of that choreographic work made its way into my final thesis performance. I also worked closely with John Prestianni, a jazz and theater musician, on this project to find specific connections between the different musical eras of this past century. Jazz is intrinsically linked to music, and my conversations with this artist reaffirmed how important it is to move forward as a dance artist with a strong appreciation for the past. All three of these research projects tied in to my final thesis and gave me tremendous insight into the evolution of jazz and guided me towards a very personal and interpretative journey.

Methodology

My process as a choreographer is very consistent. I find the music, and then I find the dance. Music drives me forward. My voice as a jazz artist resonates with how my body responds to what I hear. Music gives me parameters, sets the tone and the

rhythm, and establishes a feeling, an energy, and a story. It creates my dialogue on stage.

Master jazz teacher Sheron Wray has this to say about the relationship between music and dance in jazz and it sums up and how I depend on it to source my creativity.

Music remains the central creative force inspiring dancers and choreographers to generate work in this idiom. This distinction of developing movement directly from embodying the essence and attitude of the music is critical in choreographing or teaching jazz (qtd. in Guarino 14).

I started with a piece of big band swing music from a classic New Orleans band aptly named *The Preservation Hall Jazz Band* and moved into the studio to begin improvising on my own. I explored movement phrases and let my body respond spontaneously to the rhythmic inflections in the music. Improvisation fuels my conversation with the music and allows for dynamic play. I filmed myself throughout this initial four-week process and slowly created my movement vocabulary.

I made the decision early on to dance in my choreographic thesis presentation. As this was a personal reflection of my own relationship with jazz and my creative work, I wanted to be a part of the physical process as well as the performance. It was important to immerse myself in the movement and to experience ‘my jazz’ as a dancer as well as a choreographer. It would allow me a more visceral exploration and develop a deeper connection with the other dancers. In addition, as it was my intention to present a piece that spoke to both the history of jazz dance and my own creative work, I felt it was important that I relay the narrative to the audience.

The other seven dancers in my cast joined me in the last six weeks leading up to the performance: Kelly Liz Bolick, Kaylin Carlucci, Julie Carter, Marc-Antoine Denechaud, Drew Fountain, Constance Nicolas Vellozi, and Luis Villar. I was fortunate enough to have pulled together a group of dancers who were familiar with my style, and

who were strong, well trained artists. I scheduled four-hour rehearsals every weekend and held review sessions after my open jazz class at Steps on Broadway. This worked out well as class served as a warm-up for our run-throughs. I sometimes pulled sections of the choreography into class, which provided additional opportunities to revise the work. I moved quickly through the rehearsal process, but I was also extremely organized and thorough.

Much of the piece was choreographed before group rehearsals began. I worked with my assistant, Kelly Bolick, to figure out partnering sections and general staging and put sections reserved for improvisation and collaboration on hold until we were well underway. It felt important for me to take some time to introduce the dancers to the different pieces of the puzzle before I asked them to explore and infuse their own movement. I also wanted to establish a strong connection with each piece of music before letting the choreography take off in different directions. This was very much a personal piece and it had to begin with my own relationship with jazz. Once that groundwork was laid out I opened the floor and let my dancers lend their individual voices into specific section of the work.

If a dancer truly has the vivacity of jazz and can express rhythm to a high degree, s/he will undoubtedly add further definition to the choreography and bring to it and unparalleled life force (Wray qtd. in Guarino 15).

To develop a sense of trust and community amongst the dancers we spent time during our first rehearsals learning more about each other. We talked about our individual training in dance and our education in jazz specifically. It was interesting to gain insight into each dancer's history, and it helped me to better understand what drew them to jazz in first place. We also watched each other improvise to the first piece of music in the

piece, motivated by individual familiar movement and musical impulses. It set the tone for what would follow and created a sense of community among us. It also created an appreciation within the group for what each artist brought to the project. Constance Nicolas Vellozi is from France and found her passion in Afro Brazilian jazz. Luis Villar is from Venezuela and brings a Latin flair to his style of jazz. Kelly Bolick is from North Carolina and is focused on theatrical jazz. Drew Fountain was trained as a concert jazz dancer, while Marc- Antoine Denechaud was trained in ballet before being introduced to jazz. These dancers exemplify how jazz dance is a fusion of styles and forms. They were incredibly receptive to opening themselves up to new movement within this project as well as contributing to the work with their own creative ideas.

Connecting to the past and present of jazz was difficult to conceptualize; it challenged me to illustrate the multitude of jazz styles and techniques that have evolved over the past century and physicalize them into my own movement. I needed a through line that relayed a story about the evolution of jazz dance and its influence on my creative path as a jazz choreographer; a connecting idea that would bring in the different foundational elements of jazz and at the same time foster my own interpretation of the art form - enter the suitcase and a flood of ideas! The suitcase represented the idea of motion and of traveling between different time periods and between places. It was also a metaphor for the multitude of identities that jazz dance encompasses. A suitcase holds what we need to create different personas. I packed things that illustrated how we can portray ourselves as jazz artists in such distinctive ways based on what we carry with us: a black bowler hat, an African drum, a bow tie, a flapper dress, a long black glove, a handheld fan, a long brightly colored piece of fabric. Each object evokes a different

image of jazz and is linked to a specific style and/or period. The drum represents the roots of jazz in West African dance, the long piece of fabric pulls in a more contemporary style of jazz, the flapper dress is reminiscent of the 1920's, the derby hat represents the move to theatrical jazz in the 1930's and 40's, and the bowtie to the craze of the Lindy Hop in the 1930's as well as to the Golden Age of Hollywood and the movies that highlighted some form of jazz or vernacular movement. There are a multitude of objects I could have added to the suitcase but I narrowed it down so as not to get pulled in too many directions. My focus was to relay the history of jazz dance to my own journey as a jazz dance artist.

Thesis Presentation

My thesis presentation took place at the Martha Graham Studios in New York City on April 7th, 2017. I chose this venue because of the physical space, a beautiful wide-open performance studio that gave ample room to stage my choreography. We were fortunate enough to rehearse in the space twice before the tech and performance. It was a gift to not only become acclimated with the studio floor and with the depth of the room, but to also find our own performative energy.

My choreographic thesis presentation entitled, *Make Way*, is broken down into eight different sections. Each one had a different historical or artistic motivation.

1- The Magic of Jazz (*What is Jazz?* Club des Belugas)

The first section of the piece introduced the story and set the stage for the performance. It let the audience in on what the suitcase represented and how it was connected to the evolution of jazz dance. I ran with the idea that the suitcase held some sort of magical quality. As I opened the suitcase music began to play; there was a groove

in it, characteristic of jazz that instigated a repetitive pulse in my body. I played with its rhythm and allowed myself to get carried away in my own improvisation. At the end, I picked up the suitcase and dropped its contents out on the floor, to take a closer look at what was inside and to share it with the audience. Out fell the drum, the bowler hat, the bowtie, the dress, the handheld fan, the brightly colored fabric and the black glove - all of which were tied to the various styles of jazz: Latin, theatrical, African, Afro-Brazilian, contemporary, and vernacular. It was up to me to decide what to do with them next.

2- Give and Take (*Let the Groove Get In* - Justin Timberlake)

Staring down at the contents of the suitcase, I tried to make sense of how each object related to the history of jazz dance and how I might use it to create my own artistic interpretation. As I watched the first dancer enter and improvise to the music in her Afro Brazilian jazz style, I picked up a small bongo drum from the floor and put it back in the suitcase. The next dancer was of a more contemporary jazz style. I found a long piece of material on the floor that emulated her movement. Next was a Latin jazz dancer for which I grabbed the bright red handheld fan. Each artist embodied a different form of jazz, and each one was represented by something that went back into the suitcase, into a shared world of dance and music.

In this section, informally named the ‘Splat Section’, I included different artistic influences, jazz styles and techniques and jumped between different eras. I threw it all on the floor, like colors on a blank canvas simply to witness the beautiful chaos it created. I highlighted specific jazz choreographers such as Gus Giordano, Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse, and Jack Cole because they are jazz pioneers who inspire me creatively. I moved from contemporary jazz, to theatrical jazz, to Latin, and Afro-Brazilian and connected the

dots through set choreography and group improvisation. What I discovered is that the blend of rhythmic dynamics and physical attributes that emerge through these different styles, and developed by these pioneers, provide me with the tools to bring forth my own voice and to make more informed choreographic choices. As stated by Bob Boross,

We pay our respects to the founders of jazz dance when we continue to use their remarkable inventions with reverence. I feel that a dance can be seen as ‘jazz’ as long as the choreographer is knowledgeable of jazz dance history and its defining characteristics and utilizes those characteristics in a fashion that honors the jazz dance heritage (qtd. in Guarino 11).

For me, it is also about recognizing the rich complexity of jazz dance and making sense of how one thing has the potential to lead to something else. For instance, before I inserted a signature jazz position from the Giordano technique, I showed my dancers the exact stance from a picture in his book, *The Anthology of Jazz Dance*. We analyzed the position of the arms, the inverted angle of the foot and the explosive energy displayed in his hands. We mimicked it in the mirror, and discussed how it felt in our own bodies. It was important to have that visceral experience together so that a connection could be made between the precision in jazz technique and the expressiveness in its movement. We improvised together on how that one position could morph and move into something different. I took these moments and layered them into my own style of movement, one that is grounded, takes space, changes levels, is rich in polycentrism, interacts with more contemporary music and exudes a high level of performative energy.

The title of the song, *Let the Groove Get In*, was very fitting with jazz dance and demonstrated how jazz dancers respond to the insistent rhythm of the music and connect to its cool aesthetic. It was by intention not jazz music, but its rhythmic dynamics offered ample opportunities to play with syncopation, hesitation, and dramatic stops within a

contemporary piece of music. It was a creative way of drawing tradition with experimentation.

This section of the piece ended in a circle – symbolic of the African traditions in dance, which often revolved around tribal rituals and community. Two pieces of music were overlaid and then moved solely into African drums. The focus changed to a more primitive feeling and a profound rhythmic response to movement.

3- Rhythmic Roots (*African Drums and Soukous*)

This section of my thesis presentation briefly highlighted the deeply embedded African roots of jazz dancing and the profound influence that they have had not only on the rhythm of jazz dance but the movement characteristics within it: the grounded feeling in jazz, the looseness of the body, the dynamic spine, and the polycentrism within its isolations. I incorporated these elements throughout the performance but I needed this moment to congregate and to feel the collective rhythm and energy of group. This section continued to infuse improvisation, but also touched on the use of call and response, a specific characteristic of African dance that deeply influenced first tap and then jazz dance in America.

This part of the piece was challenging to assemble. I started again with the music, and chose to collaborate with my dancers on the steps and formations. I expected them to be eager to lend their voices to the choreography, but I was met instead with silence and felt a complete sense of disconnect. I pushed through that rehearsal, leaving this section empty and went home to reflect on what went wrong. I made the realization that I had assumed that everyone understood why including a section based in African music and dance was so important to the piece. They understood jazz was rooted in West

African traditions, but I did not adequately convey my motivation for drawing this element into my story. When we reconvened a few days later, I spent some time explaining how I wanted to physically portray the migration of African slaves to America and connect the origins of jazz to the early influences of black dancing on American plantations. I discussed how during the period of enslavement in America, African slaves were prohibited from using musical instruments, but that “they found a staccato, consistent rhythm by patting their bodies and stomping their feet on the ground” (Nur Amin in Guarino 38). This was important to incorporate together. I explained that as African dances slowly merged with American social dances as well as with European influences, a rhythmic folk dance began to emerge. While the term ‘*jazz*’ was not conceived until the early 20th Century, its inception occurred hundreds of years prior through the traditions of West African tribes, and through their syncopated rhythms and propulsive energy. This information, a vital piece of the creative puzzle was left out in our prior rehearsal. I needed to not only draw the origins of jazz into this section, but ensure that we all understood its relevance for what would come next. We formed a circle together and decided together to move that shape repeatedly to different spots on the stage. By doing so, we touched on the communal traditions and rituals within African music and dance and demonstrated how they made their way to this country to establish the roots of jazz.

I incorporated vocalization into specific moments of this section to develop a deeper connection to the grounded feeling in jazz and to add a physical response to individual outbursts of energy. There is such power behind rhythmic vocalization in any

genre of dance, most especially in the African roots of jazz. As Billy Siegenfeld, founder of the Jump Rhythm Jazz Project states,

Performing rhythm vocally as well as pioneer supports two objectives. It reinforces the goal of Jump Rhythm's first practice, that of grounding the body so that it can move with power and efficiency; and it connect students to 'the indivisibility of movement and sound,' in particular to the way African American-based performance uses the language of rhythm to fuse music and dance (Siegenfeld 9).

I was not sure how my dancers would respond to my request to add audible sounds to their movements, but it happened so easily and it connected the group both rhythmically and emotionally. It also fueled tremendous energy that sustained us throughout this section and instigated individual responses and reactions.

4- Look Back and Listen (*The Entertainer* - Marvin Hamlisch; *The Thrill is Gone* - B.B. King; *Millenberg Joys* - Bob Mandell & His Wolverines; *Faith* - George Michael)

Jazz music grew out of Ragtime and the Blues and jazz dance was influenced by the rhythms of both. In the 1920's, the Charleston gained immense popularity in the dance halls around the country, as well as on Broadway, and by the 1930's jazz swing style music and dance were at their peak (Guarino 47). By the 1940's, bebop became the new style of jazz music, and jazz as a social dance turned to other styles such as Latin music, rhythm and blues, funk and eventually pop. Music is intrinsically linked to jazz dance, and as the former changes, so too does the latter.

"Every decade of jazz seems a restless age. Originally an expression of African-American culture, it has proven to be a compelling art form and an expressive mode for many people and cultures around the world. It is by nature innovative, always moving and changing" (Crosby and Moss in Guarino 67).

My motivation behind this section of the piece was to play with the idea of the suitcase carrying me through the past and present of jazz dance. I used four short pieces of music that were played as the suitcase opened, and stopped abruptly when it closed. Within each

brief interlude, one of the dancers took the lead and gave the audience a taste of specific historical moments in jazz: Ragtime, the Blues and the Charleston. It was a playful storytelling moment that ended with a jump to the 1980's. It was a creative way of sharing the origins of jazz dance with the audience. Once I had explained the historical relevance of each piece of music to the dancers, I let them create their improvised responses to its specific style. This was an example of how I brought pedagogy into the creative process.

5- **Put a Lid on It** (*Put a Lid on It* - Squirrel Nut Zippers)

This section played with the history of jazz dance and with the complexity of its nature. There are a multitude of styles that jazz encompasses and it is difficult to make sense of how they all fall under the same umbrella, or find themselves in the same suitcase. The dancers urged to me 'put the lid' on the suitcase, implying that we had enough in there already and did not have room for anything else. I explained (through dance) that there will always be more to pack into the suitcase - more space to make for jazz dance in all its layers and shapes.

Specifically, I wanted to exemplify how we can find pivotal moments in our own artistry by having a broad base of historical knowledge about the art form. For instance, how a familiarity with the Lindy Hop can influence an improvised partner section, or how a stylized Fosse walk can inspire new dynamic movement in the spine or the pelvis. It can be as simple as a mental snapshot that encourages creativity. In one run-through of this section I pulled out a long black glove from the suitcase. As I put it on and raised my arm up above me, I suddenly caught myself emulating Rita Hayworth in *Put the Blame on Mame*. As I later reflected on that moment, I thought back to my research

on Jack Cole. Without even realizing it, I had drawn inspiration for that movement from studying his style and technique. It was not my intention to mimic Rita Hayworth. It was instead a moment I associated with Jack Cole, and which I manipulated to make my own. It was such a simple thing but it felt significant. I shared it with my dancers, and then tossed the glove back in the suitcase, holding on to what it had given me.

As this section moved forward, I urged the dancers to share in my excitement about the valuable secrets locked in the suitcase and pulled them into a short piece, one that was influenced by the Charleston, the Lindy and the swing of jazz music with all its syncopations and unexpected pops of rhythm. In it too were my stylistic choices and my blend of jazz aesthetics: playful yet very precise, energetic but effectively contained, and a mix of the old with the new.

6- Take it to the Stage (*Shall We Dance?* Stacey Kent)

This duet was an ode to a classic theatrical jazz style from the 1930's and 40's. I chose a contemporary jazz version of "Shall We Dance?" from *The King and I*, to experiment with my own interpretation of this particular jazz style. The feeling is so different from the grounded aesthetic of African movement; there is a lightness to it, and a smoothness in its transitions, yet the rhythmic quality of jazz is still present. What remains important is the seemingly casual conversation with the music and the rhythmic interjections within the dance. The choreography for this piece came very naturally. I took my time to pick up the subtleties behind the swing of the music and I enjoyed having the freedom to play with its syncopation, moments of hesitation, and sudden stops juxtaposed with a continuous fluidity. I also loved blending different aesthetics together, the looseness of jazz dance with the classical lines of ballet, and the rhythmic

interjections of tap to create a style that felt very much my own. There is a timeless yet sophisticated quality to this style of dance, and as a jazz choreographer there is so much to explore in maintaining that balance.

7- **Jazz on the Town** (*What Would You Say?* Dave Matthews)

Here I moved further into my own world with a more contemporary style of jazz dance. There is an eclectic groove to this Dave Matthews song that may not swing like jazz music, but it is a good example of how I experiment elsewhere with the rhythmic dynamics of jazz. For me, the dialogue between the dance and the music changes all the time, but the relationship between the two is steady and continuous. It is simply a new conversation with different rhythmic qualities. As stated by Bob Boross,

Jazz music has a sophisticated use of rhythm, and a jazz dancer should in some way draw from this deep well. This is of prime importance when the music used is not jazz. Whether it takes shape in sly syncopations or the play of sharp accents that gently slur the center of a straight beat, the jazz dancer should display a skill in internalizing qualities that are found in jazz rhythms and making those rhythmic qualities visible in the body (qtd. in Guarino 10).

The title of the song “*What Would You Say?*” opened the door to a discussion about what I bring to jazz dance through contemporary music and dance, while staying connected to the roots of the art form. There is still a grounded feeling in the movement, fluidity in the spine, an inner energy that explodes down and out through the extremities. There is also a propulsive rhythm that challenges the dancers and choreography that brings vernacular dance to the floor. The shapes of the movements are important, but there is also a clear intention, an individual expression and clear isolations in the body. The fundamental elements of jazz are preserved but it moves forward with a relished freedom to experiment. As I moved through the choreography with my dancers, I focused on these specific aspects of jazz, taking time to explain why they are valuable and how they

inform a more contemporary piece of jazz dance, again adding an educational component to the process.

This section was a tip of the hat to Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free*. As the previous piece ended, three boys get ready for a night out on the town. They entered with the suitcase in hand and popped it open to discover three black derby hats. The hats are associated with theatrical jazz, but the choreography intentionally crosses over into different styles of jazz. It draws from the flirtatious energy in the previous section as the boys vie for the attention of four girls but veers towards a more vivacious and dynamic type of dance. In the end, the girls leave the boys behind, and in keeping with the plot in *Fancy Free*, a new girl walks out on stage and the boys jump at a second chance. This was an intentional nod to Jerome Robbins as he is someone who has always inspired me. As a ballet and musical theater choreographer, he infused jazz dance into so much of his work and drew on vernacular dance to relay a narrative. What I learned from Jerome Robbins is the art of mixing one discipline with another. My own jazz style has evolved by pulling in ballet, tap, Scottish highland dance, Latin, African, and vernacular dance. I am by no means the only choreographer to borrow from other genres to create something new, but the fusion will always be to varying degrees and with different weight given to each.

8- Finding My Own Way (*That's Life*: Michael Buble)

This section was a reflective piece about my own process as a jazz artist; my interpretation of the art form based on my training and my own individual experiences. Finding the suitcase now empty, it was my turn now to fill it with things that reflected my personal journey with jazz dance. I have discovered that my strongest

voice emerges from the music, and through the blend of aesthetics that I incorporate into my choreography. Chet Walker once said, “Jazz takes the very best parts of every form of dance.” Jean Sabatine, in her article *Jazz Dance the American Hybrid*, attests to the importance of diversity in jazz by referring to how it draws from the following aesthetics: the precision from ballet, the freedom from modern, the passion of the primitive, the angularity of East Indian isolations, the vivacity of show dance, and the dramatic intensity of theater dance. All of this makes jazz a blended art form, dependent on the background and exposure of the dancemaker (in Giordano 113).

What I put in to this piece, and what I end up sharing with the female dancers, is ‘my life’ as a jazz educator and choreographer through the music and movement that resonate with my own experiences. I have focused specifically on how I respond to music and how I find my rhythm in jazz dance when there is no direct connection to the swing rhythm of jazz music. I have discovered through this self-exploration that in searching for an interesting or surprising rhythm, I play with the elements of space, time and energy and mix that into my movement. More than a visceral response to what I hear, I make a conscious choice to play with rhythm by changing how I relate to one or all three. I think there is something exciting in extending oneself spatially and having to push to arrive at a new destination in time with the music. By almost being late, the accent is slightly extended, and the next movement is pushed to catch up. With respect to time, I find it interesting to sometimes move slowly through a set rhythm, even if the beat of the music is pushing me to quicken my pace. The same is equally effective in reverse. I execute a movement quickly to run ahead of a rhythm and then find my way back. With respect to energy- sometimes less is more. Working against a grounded beat,

I can change how the rhythm of the music is felt by expending less energy in a movement. It creates a different texture in the dance. Master teacher Sheron Wray takes this idea further.

Rhythm also calls for stillness to make itself clear. Therefore, the jazz dancer must be able to bring high velocity movement to a forceful stop, which requires motor precision and control. Stillness must not be blurred. Its dynamic potential is intended to generate feelings of surprise for the audience. The jazz dancing body is multi-centered, whereby every single part and surface has equal inventive potential (qtd. in Guarino 13).

There are dynamics to play with in experimenting with space, time and energy and each adds a different tonality to the music and the movement. I view my ongoing objective as a dancemaker in jazz as being able to sustain a profound and spontaneous dialogue with the music, regardless of its genre. This does not mean that I should necessarily parallel what I hear, but rather that I create my own interjections and responses.

The empty suitcase pushed me to draw inspiration not just from what came before me, but from what is within me as well. The female dancers who joined me on stage all wore different colored button-down shirts. As they walked on, I improvised around them, drawing a different energy from each of them. They represented my own palette of colors - colors that mix together in my work as a jazz artist. At the end of the piece, those brightly colored shirts were left on the floor for me to pick up. I dropped them into the suitcase, along with my aesthetics, my musicality, my history and my passion. It was a visual reminder that jazz requires not only preservation, but interpretation and personal innovation as well. I put my trust in the foundation of jazz but seek new avenues to explore through the music. It is innovation in the sense of creating new work on an individual scale and challenging dancers and audiences to see something new in how it is developed - seeing one beside the other, the old with the new, and recognizing how one

informs the other. It is how I make my way in jazz and strive to maintain its weight in the dance world. “Jazz history is a landscape of evolving meanings, values, ideas, sounds, movements, contestations, contradictions, pluralities, and multiple constructions of ‘what is jazz’ (Crosby and Moss in Guarino 45). If that is true, then let me evolve along with it and travel with my own baggage.

9- **Back to the Savoy** (*Santiago* - Preservation Hall Jazz Band)

The last piece took the audience back to the Savoy Ballroom in New York City where jazz dance exploded with the Lindy Hop. It was my take on where jazz dance began, and my interpretation of where the past meets the present. Above all, it was intended to entertain the audience. When all is said and done jazz will always be the dance for and of the people. I wanted to illustrate what Mura Dehn, who documented African-American vernacular dance at the Savoy Ballroom in the Golden Era of Jazz explained so succinctly,

Jazz is a clown among arts! That probably is the reason it is so difficult for the serious academician to recognize the seriousness and significance of this profoundly human and timely folk art. Perhaps someday, soon, there will be more respect for the clown - for he is a true expression of the people’s art desire. (qtd. in Giordano 26).

I started the piece by pulling out a multicolored piece of fabric from the suitcase; it was made up of each of the colors worn by the dancers in the last piece. As I threw the shirts into the suitcase alongside my own white shirt, I found a combination of colors in a single stretch of material, representative of my own rhythmic dynamics, movement characteristics and personal aesthetic choices. I closed the suitcase, and for the first time the music continued to play. I sat on stage listening to the music of the Jazz Era, and yet I was amongst my own things, and within my own dance. My aim was to illustrate that the history of jazz comes with us, and if we pay attention we can take from it what we value

most to maintain its significance. It is the conclusion I have drawn through my research, what I conveyed to my dancers, and what I continue to explore.

I tied the fabric to the handle of the suitcase and picked it up as the dancers joined me on stage to make our way ‘back to the Savoy,’ where some of the best music and dancing of the Jazz Age came together. Throughout this final piece the suitcase became a physical part of the choreography and was constantly in motion, making its way to every corner of the stage, continuously changing hands. It had to stay in motion - that is the whole point of jazz. It is constantly changing, innovating, and yet it is unquestionably linked to the marriage of swing bands and Jitterbug dancers. As Jack Cole once said about jazz dancing,

It’s what we used to see in the dance halls in the twenties and thirties, that is what real jazz dance is. This was a group of kids who did all those dances that were in then: The Camel Walk, the Charleston, the Lindy Hop...all stemming from African dance and all filled with authentic feeling. And the root of all these elaborations was the Lindy. Whatever is danced in the name of jazz dancing must come from the Lindy, necessarily theatricalized and broadened for the stage, of course (qtd. in Valis Hill 29).

As my own jazz voice resonates in the studio and on the stage, I take this with me.

Relevance of the Research to the Field

Marshall Stearns referred to jazz as a ‘time-honored exploration’ (Stearns 362). Jazz has always been about experimentation and improvisation, but the foundation of the art form must always be revered and respected. Upholding the history of jazz dance is important and it is also very difficult because the art form speaks to the changing values and trends of society. It also reflects shifts in popular music and is therefore often vulnerable of becoming outdated. As the music changes with the times so too does the dance, and unfortunately in jazz, some of the most wonderful techniques and styles get

left behind because they no longer reflect what is popular in current society. The priority then must be to educate young dancers and provide them with an appreciation of how one style inspires the next, and how one pioneer of jazz dance can influence generations of artists that follow.

I do not believe that you can understand one end of the jazz dance continuum without acknowledging the other (Cohen in Guarino 4). I have examined the many ways jazz dance has adapted and grown with changing times. It has taken on a new identity with almost each decade of the 20th and 21st centuries, but I agree with Patricia Cohen that it should always connect back in some way to the roots of the art form. In most recent years jazz has become more specifically categorized as contemporary jazz, Latin jazz, street jazz, jazz fusion, or world jazz, making it even more difficult to formulate a singular definition. It crosses over between many disciplines of dance and is influenced by a multitude of ethnic traditions. While change is always welcome there is something vital to be learned from this history and I believe that it should be applied to how jazz dance is passed along from teacher to student. Consider this:

The pause is not an empty waiting for energy, but a stop charged with withheld rhythm and energy. That is what gives jazz such a contagious quality. No movement, no matter how explosive, has used itself to the end. There is always a reserve. A good jazz teacher insists on subtle movement. In other words, a movement that implies more than it shows. Jazz dancing is essentially subtle and sophisticated. (Wray in Guarino 26)

How do we teach this to young dancers? As educators, we can urge them to respond to the music and to find that ‘jazz feeling.’ We can explain it through metaphors, or search for it in the movement. I believe that a more effective pedagogical approach is to first learn by example and to then be taught how to physicalize those examples. Jack Cole emulated that energy, that tension, and that sophistication in his own jazz style. He was a

master of using pauses in his movements and of exuding a signature cool aesthetic. His choreography, through explosive and dynamic outbursts always had a reserve of energy and never faded out. It remained focused and intentional (Valis Hill 35). To learn from him, though, we must preserve his work, his name, his innovative ideas, and pass that on to the next generation. As we get further away from the time in which he lived, and as we lose those who were fortunate enough to be his students, we risk seeing his legacy fade. This is true of other jazz dance pioneers as well. There are only a handful of codified jazz techniques that were born from these masters. How many jazz warm-ups begin with a Luigi's signature reaches? How many young dancers even know that they are benefitting from his lifelong work?

As I put this piece together, I researched the history of jazz, not to reiterate information or to pack my choreography with regurgitated movements but to understand its impact on my own artistry and relay that knowledge with my dancers. I believe that innovation is empty without preservation, but preservation fades without innovation. African American dance pioneer Donald McKayle once said,

I am always glad when I see new movement. It's just I hate this sort of throwing out the old as if it was garbage, you know? You have to preserve and build, rather than remove and replace. As in any technique." (qtd. in Guarino 129)

As a modern dance artist who also brought so much to the landscape of jazz and who worked with some of the great jazz innovators like Jack Cole, I take heed in these words.

We can learn about polycentric rhythm in jazz dance by exploring its connection to West African traditions and to jazz music; we can understand why there is a strong feeling of solidarity between the body and the earth by acknowledging its deep African roots (Stearns 16); we can appreciate the improvisational aspect of jazz dance by

engaging in vernacular movements; we can witness the cool aesthetic of jazz in Jerome Robbins' *Opus Jazz* or its sophisticated style in Bob Fosse's performance in *The Snake*. We preserve this past so that the movement characteristics, rhythmic dynamics and blended aesthetics of jazz dance have a foundation from which to grow and expand.

Instead of simply teaching these important aspects of jazz and talking about their value in jazz dance today, is it not more effective to incorporate that learning into a choreographic process? Dancers learn by engaging in a visceral experience with movement. If I can verbally incorporate historical and artistic knowledge about jazz directly into my own movement vocabulary, will that not resonate more in their bodies and in their minds? It certainly gives them something more to consider as performers. That is what I set out to accomplish with thesis and what I imparted through my performance. I tap into the past and create my own innovative form of jazz by bringing a pedagogical element into the creative process. It is ongoing and developing but I believe that it strengthens my work as a jazz artist.

Results and Implications for the Future

This project was a learning process for my dancers as well as for myself. The historical information that I brought into the piece was discussed in detail throughout the rehearsal process. Together we connected the dots between the past and present of jazz and discussed the implications of its roots on its offshoots of styles and techniques. The collective takeaway centered around the need for a deeper understanding of the art form and an appreciation for its diversity. By combining seemingly disparate elements of jazz dance with contemporary iterations of both classic jazz music and popular vernacular idioms, my choreography is an investigation of the fluency and flexibility of jazz dance

as an art form. My personal brand of innovation relies heavily on mining the influences of the past as a springboard for exploring where the form is heading. This is my conversation with jazz.

When I look back at my choreographic process for this thesis and the culminating performance, I am struck by how much I infused into my piece and the depth of the historical and fundamental information about jazz that was included along the way. What I see are creative interpretations of both the past and the present of jazz and a profound connection linked most directly through music. It was a challenge to have given myself such a broad scope for this project and it was difficult to combine all my research into one performance, but it certainly drove home why jazz dance is such a difficult art form to pin down and why I remain inspired to exploring its possibilities as a choreographer. I stand by my choreographic approach to moving jazz forward through a creative process that incorporates a strong pedagogical element. Ultimately what I created was a way to share and promote jazz dance as a deeply rooted but constantly evolving American art form.

Jazz dance is continually supported by - yet also challenged by - popular culture and the ideals and trends of younger generations. In a similar way that jazzercise threatened the reputation of jazz dance in the 1970's and 1980's, the current trend seems to be a shift towards a competition influenced, flashy, trick -filled form of jazz. How do I as a jazz educator and choreographer help to move jazz forward as a recognizable art form, an innovation of itself, as opposed to something unhinged from its roots? I believe that by incorporating the historical knowledge and the fundamental elements of jazz directly into the choreography, and by communicating how it connects together, I can

help students see past this one prevailing style of jazz. My creative approach and my work promote the history of jazz and inform dancers, students, and audiences how it can be preserved in more contemporary work.

I am encouraged in this endeavor by the feedback that I received. Some of the more salient remarks included that there was a clear through line that tied the history of jazz to an individual interpretation of the art form; there was so much history infused into the work without it being forced on anyone; the more you knew about jazz dance the more you picked up on in the choreography but the whole audience could appreciate the energy of the piece and its entertainment value; every moment of the performance was you. This last statement was important because my goal from the beginning was not just to highlight jazz as a complex and meaningful art form; it was to exemplify how I use that history to expand myself as a jazz artist, to find my own voice, and to create something significant. From my dancers, I received the following feedback:

As a jazz dance teacher, this project has inspired me to incorporate more academia into my classes. The time allotted for class does not always allow for this, but I think even the smallest inclinations will make a difference. Instilling an appreciation in future jazz dance generations is vital to the survival of its history (Kelly Liz Bolick).

With your piece I also felt strongly that we all individually were welcomed to bring ourselves and our style in the choreography. And it is definitely a quality of jazz to greet and bring individuality together. Your choreography was very precise and human and helped us to feel super united with our differences (Marc-Antoine Denechaud).

For me, it's always been jazz. It's how I started learning dance as a child, it's why I pursued dance in college after high school, and it's why I moved to this city and what I continue to search for. I feel the most connected to my emotions and my human spirit when I'm dancing jazz - whether through contemporary, lyrical, or classical styles. It will always be my home, and it's brought me on this incredible life journey that keeps me guessing at every turn (Julie Carter).

The choreography stays faithful to the jazz vocabulary but combines it with drops of modernity. It keeps the roots but adapts with the modern world we live in today. It keeps evolving. That's what makes your style unique (Constance Nicholas Vellozi).

As I continue my research both as an educator and choreographer, my next step is to incorporate this research into a teaching model for jazz teachers in studio settings. That model will reflect how a creative process in jazz should coincide with educational components. I would like to better prepare students for higher education by creating more informed dancers. I have always pushed my dancers to excel technically and stylistically - they must if they want to keep up with the demands of the industry and the constant crossover between dance disciplines. A common problem, though, for many young artists entering the professional field is that they are disconnected from the roots of the art form and are thus poorly equipped to latch on to jazz styles that do not coincide with the trend setting jazz they are attracted to. I have developed gradual changes in my own pedagogical approach by making time to educate students about the origins of jazz movements, the feeling and the style behind them, and the artists responsible for creating them.

I am eager to continue my research within higher education and to share my passion and commitment to jazz dance. I do not believe that enough colleges take advantage of what this art form can contribute to their dance programs. I want to continue to bring more jazz to the curriculum and exemplify the equal importance of traditional and modern jazz idioms and how they support each other. I am interested in developing a jazz dance course that combines both a historical academic component and technical repertory; one that includes research about the art form as well as physical movement and choreography that draws from this information. The aim would be to investigate how

present-day jazz dance connects to a more primitive past and how this generation continues to push its boundaries.

I am also interested in developing a course in higher education that focuses on the relationship between music and jazz dance in swing as well as in other idioms. My aim is to improve musicality through the interaction of dancers and live musicians, teaching students to physicalize their knowledge about the polyrhythms of jazz and to develop a more informed response to music through dance.

Given such a rich heritage jazz dance can be a vital, integral part of a dance curriculum at any educational level. It reflects the essential role in human experience and expression that jazz dance has played in the history of our country. It is one of America's unique cultural contributions to the world of dance and art, and primary export commodity (Frances-Fisher 62).

I have never felt so committed to jazz dance, nor have I ever felt so indebted to its history. As a jazz educator for 25 years, this project has served as a catalyst by opening new windows in the form for me and connecting me even more deeply to my work. I feel more grounded as a jazz artist and am eager to continue to drive the form forward in my own, 'time-honored' way.

Jazz is a hybrid art form born out of African-American vernacular dance. It is a style, a technique and a feeling. It reflects American history and of its heterogeneous culture and it is a vital component of any dancer's training. Ballet and modern choreographers have for decades incorporated jazz into their work. That trend shows no sign of stopping and it requires that dancers learn to be versatile and technically efficient in multiple disciplines. Jazz might take the best parts of every genre of dance, but it gives back tenfold through its "skillful combination of rhythm and design" (Mattox in Boross 54). My next step will be to pursue publication of my writing with respect to the

education of jazz dance in studio training as well as in higher education, and to the polycentrism of the art form. This thesis has sparked a strong desire to continue my conversation with this idiom.

As a working creative artist today, my research has had a profound effect on both the content of my choreography and on my pedagogical approach. I have expanded the foundation of my work through the history of jazz dance. My creative voice is one amongst many in this field, but it is one that honors the structure and signature of jazz by finding a balance between tradition and experimentation. I believe that is what makes what I do Jazz. I stand by an adherence to the history of a deeply embedded art form, and acknowledge the innovative pioneers who paved its way forward. I balance that with a dedication to play with the fundamental elements of jazz through rhythm and movement, and to expand and challenge my own creativity.

Born of a fusion, jazz is sophisticated and earthy, high flying and low to the ground. Jazz is of the blues and swing, funk and pop, and a whole lot of rhythm. It is alive and in motion around the world (Crosby and Moss in Guarino 67).

I have learned not just to question jazz as a dance form but to trust it as well. I have my own avenues to explore as I move forward as a working artist in this discipline. My work and my discoveries continue.

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Thesis Concert Documentation

Choreographic Thesis Performance

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/t53yas9mlwpe5lb/Lisa%20Harvie%20Covin%20-%20Thesis%20Performance%3A%20Make%20Way.mp4?dl=0>

Thesis Performance Program

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